



## GUIDE TO THE NEW ZEALAND PARLIAMENT

The Parliament of New Zealand is based on the Westminster model. It has a constitutional monarch, a sovereign Parliament and the fundamental business of government is distributed among three separate bodies. This principle is known as the separation of powers.

The separation of powers refers to the **legislative**, comprising of the House of Representatives; the **executive**, comprising of the Governor-General, Ministers of the Crown and government departments and agencies; and the **judiciary**, comprising the judges and courts, which are free from political decision. This separation exists to ensure that the fundamental principles of government are not concentrated in one entity.

### THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

General elections are held every three years. New Zealand's electoral system is known as MMP (Mixed Member Proportional). Under MMP, members of Parliament are elected as either electorate members of Parliament (representing a geographical area and their party) or as list members of Parliament (representing their party only). New Zealand is divided into 63 general electorates and 7 Maori electorates i.e. specifically for Maori representation. There are more electorate members of Parliament than list members.

Under MMP, a voter is entitled to two votes – an electorate vote and a party vote. The party vote determines the number of seats each party gets in Parliament. The number of seats is proportional to the number of party votes the party obtains in the election. For example, if a party gets 45% of all party votes, that then translates to 45% of the seats in the House.

A party must get a minimum of 5% of the party vote or win one electorate seat in order to secure a seat in Parliament. If a party doesn't get a clear majority on its own, it has to form a coalition with like-minded parties or become a minority government. Coalition between parties is formed through several different agreements, the most common of these are: Coalition agreements; Confidence and Supply agreements, and Co-operation agreements.

## THE FUNCTIONS OF PARLIAMENT

### Law Making

A key role of Parliament is to make new laws. Parliament can also repeal (abolish) or change existing laws. A proposed law is known as a **bill**. Any member of Parliament can introduce a bill but most are introduced by Ministers and these are called Government bills. A bill must pass through three stages (readings) in the House before it can become an Act. Following the first reading a bill is usually sent to an appropriate **select committee** for detailed study.

There are 13 subject select committees and five specialist committees. Each select committee has a membership of between five and twelve members of Parliament. Representation on the select committees is roughly proportional to the party strength in the House (generally excluding Ministers). Each select committee has a chairperson and a deputy chairperson, elected by fellow committee members, and is responsible for chairing meetings and making rulings in accordance with the Standing Orders.

Select committees allow members of Parliament to examine issues in more detail. Their work includes examining bills, estimates, financial reviews and inquiries. Each committee has individual terms of reference determining its area of work; however they are prohibited from examining allegations of criminal conduct without Parliament's permission. Items of business are also referred to committees by the House for them to consider and report back on their comments and recommendations.

The select committee will advertise in newspapers inviting the public and interest groups to write submissions commenting on the bill. It will also call for reports from Government departments. Select committees usually hear oral submissions, written submissions and for the committee to clarify points raised in submissions. Once the select committee has finished considering the bill, it decides what changes, if any, to recommend in a report to the House. The bill is then returned to the House for the **second reading**.

The next stage involves a **committee of the whole House** (where the House forms itself into a committee) considering the bill part by part. The bill can be amended at this stage. It then proceeds to its **third reading** debate. At every stage of the readings of the bill a vote is called for, a bill must have the majority of the support in the House in order to proceed to the next reading. After the third and final reading, the bill still needs the **Royal assent** (the Governor-General's signature). Once this happens, the bill becomes an Act of Parliament – a new law.

### Petitions and Government Body Reviews

In addition to making the laws of New Zealand, Parliament considers other matters. Anyone may petition the House. Petitions are referred to a select committee, which reports back to the House with any recommendations it wishes to make. Select

committees also hold inquiries and conduct annual reviews of Government departmental performance and operations, State-owned enterprises and other public bodies.

### **HOW THE HOUSE OPERATES – A TYPICAL DAY**

The house meets three days a week on Tuesday and Wednesdays from 2 pm to 10 pm and Thursday from 2 pm to 6 pm for 30 to 33 weeks of the year.

After the Speaker arrives in the House at 2 pm, he or she reads the prayer for the day. Petitions, papers and select committee reports are then announced in the house. The next item on the Order Papers is Question Time (see explanation below). Following Question Time, the House debates bills and other business set down on the Order Paper, which is the House's agenda for the day.



### **PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS**

Written and oral questions are two of the ways the New Zealand unicameral Parliament holds the Executive to account.

#### Question Time - Oral Questions

Oral questions are dealt with as the first substantive item of business transacted by the House each day during Question Time, which is held shortly after 2pm every sitting day. There are 12 questions for oral answer during Question Time. The questions are allocated to all parties including the government based on the proportional party membership in the House and are directed to Ministers. For a question to a Minister to be admissible, there must be ministerial responsibility for the subject matter of the question. The vetting of questions is managed by the Office of the Clerk.

The 12 primary questions are given on notice, which means the Minister is told what the question will be prior to Question Time. Oral questions must be lodged with the Deputy Clerk of the House by 10.30am on a House sitting day and notice is sent to Ministers offices by 11am.

During Question Time, once a Minister has replied to the primary oral question, members then have the opportunity to ask a supplementary question. Supplementary questions are not questions on notice, which means that the Minister does not have advance knowledge of the content of the question. Supplementaries must be relevant to the subject of the original question asked.

The Speaker allows each party a 'quota' of supplementaries, again, based on their proportional membership within the House, a member does not have to ask a primary question in order to ask a supplementary, however the first supplementary question is allocated to the Member who asked the primary questions. Question Time concludes

only when all 12 questions, and accompanying supplementary questions, have been answered by the Minister responsible.

### Written Questions

Members may submit an unlimited number of written questions to a Government Minister on a topic for which they have Ministerial responsibility. These questions are submitted electronically to Ministers who then have a period of six working days in which to answer the member's question. The electronic management of lodging and replying to written questions is done through the Office of the Clerk.

### **PARLIAMENT HOUSE**

Established in Auckland in 1854, the New Zealand Parliament moved to the General Assembly Building in Wellington in 1865. When fire destroyed that building in 1907, Parliament House was built and has been home to Parliament since 1918 except between 1991 and 1995 when the building closed for refurbishment. A temporary debating chamber was established in Bowen House during this time.

### **THE BEEHIVE**

The Executive Wing, known as the Beehive, was completed in 1982 and houses Ministers officers and parliamentary catering services, Bellamys. The Beehive contains 10 storeys above ground, with the Prime Minister's office located on level 9 and 2 storeys underground.



### **KEY PEOPLE IN PARLIAMENT**

#### Members of Parliament

The current House of Representatives has 122 Members; however there are normally 120 seats. Of the current 122 Members, 70 of those were electorate members, 52 of those are list members. All members of Parliament are entitled to an electorate office, even if they are not the electorate representative.

Ministers are members of Parliament who form the Executive. They hold responsibility for one or more government department or ministry. Ministers are appointed by the Governor-General on the advice of the Prime Minister. Only members of Parliament may be appointed as Ministers.

Cabinet is the Government's most senior committee. It is chaired by the Prime Minister and is made up of the 20 most senior Ministers. It is this body of members that decides on government policy, approves the content of government legislation and decides how the Government is going to spend its money. They can not create legislation and have no legal relationships with the other arms of government. Decisions from Cabinet are made by way of 'minutes', these minutes are used by Ministers to discuss with their officials. Cabinet is bound by their own rules and procedures; these rules of behavior are documented in the Cabinet Manual. In the current Government, not all Ministers are included in Cabinet.

### The Speaker

At its first meeting following a General Election, the House elects an MP to chair its meetings impartially. The Speaker's role is to apply the rules of the House (Standing Orders) and to maintain order. The Speaker decides which members will be called to speak in a debate or ask supplementary questions at Question Time. The Speaker is the channel of communication between the Governor-General and the House. The House also appoints a Deputy Speaker and up to two Assistant Speakers.

### Clerk of the House

The principal advisor to the Speaker and members of Parliament on parliamentary procedure is the Clerk of the House. The Clerk is responsible for the publication of all parliamentary documents and for recording every decision made by the House. The Clerk is also responsible for presenting all the bills passed by the House to the Governor-General for the Royal assent.

### Serjeant-At-Arms

Appointed by the Crown on the Speaker's recommendation, the Serjeant-at-Arms is an Officer of the House of Representatives. The Serjeant carries the mace in the Speaker's procession when the House begins each day and announces the Speaker's arrival in the House to members. The Serjeant's role in England dates back to 1415. However the title can be traced back further to 1192 when Phillip II of France formed a special corps to guard him in the Holy Land. The Serjeant-at-Arms maintains order in the galleries and controls access to areas near the Chamber reserved for members of Parliament.

### The Mace

The Mace symbolizes the Speaker's authority. Positioned on the Table while the House sits, it is placed on brackets under the table when the House moves into a committee of the whole House (ie while the Speaker is not chairing that part of parliamentary business). The New Zealand Mace, dating back to 1909, is made of sterling silver gilded with 18 carat gold. It is 1.49 meters long and weighs about 8kg.



### Hansard

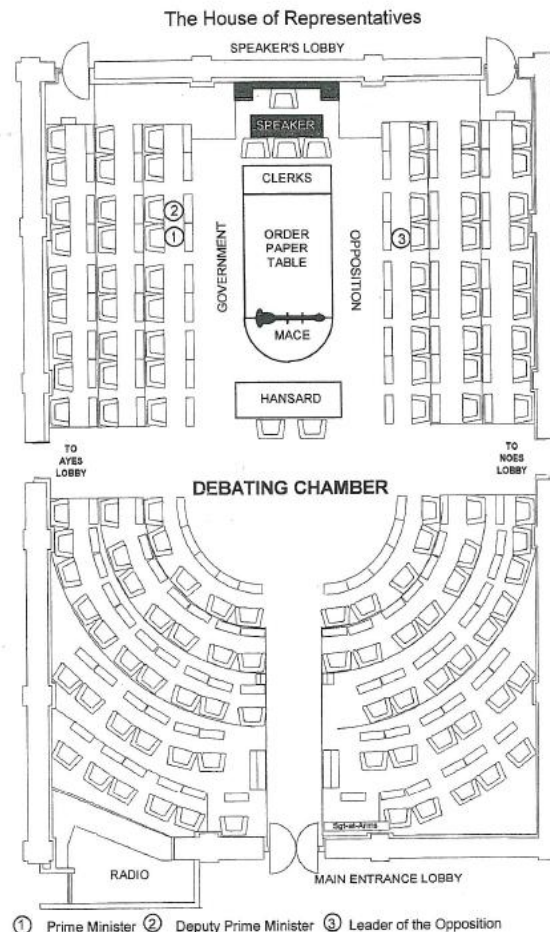
Hansard reporters record all proceedings in the House, using digital audio recorders. Until recently they wrote everything in shorthand. Now notes made in the Chamber

supplement digital recordings of the speeches. Proceedings are then prepared and delivered to members for correction. Members may make only minor changes to what they were reported as saying and must not change the meaning or substance of what they said. An advance copy is produced approximately four days after a sitting, and this is the first official report of the debate. Hansard is published on the internet and in printed form.

### The Media

The parliamentary Press Galley reports parliamentary and political news from within the parliamentary complex. Members of the Press Gallery have their own gallery in the House (above the Speaker's seat) where they note the daily events of the House. About 50 fully accredited journalists work in the press gallery. House proceedings are broadcast live on TV and radio. Television cameras also record items for TV news bulletins from the public galleries on each side of the House.

### **THE DEBATING CHAMBER**



The party or parties forming the Government sit on the Speaker's right-hand side with opposition parties on the left-hand side. The Prime Minister and the Leader of the

Opposition, sit opposite each other. Ministers generally sit in the block of seats to the Speaker's immediate right.

### THE POLITICAL PARTIES WITHIN PARLIAMENT

Party	# of MPs	General Electorate MPs	Maori Electorate MPs	List MPs
ACT NZ	5	1	-	4
Green Party	9	-	-	9
Labour Party	43	19	2	22
Maori Party	5	-	5	-
National Party	58	41	-	17
Progressive	1	1	-	-
United Future	1	1	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>52</b>

**% of women in Parliament = 38 or 31.14%**

#### New Zealand National Party



Leader: Hon John Key  
Deputy Leader: Hon Bill English

The National Party is a centre-right, socially conservative party. Their leader is the present Prime Minister. It supports a free market economy, lower taxation, and less legislative interference. The National Party has been in five Governments for varying lengths of time. Currently the National Party leads a Government with confidence and supply agreements with ACT New Zealand, the Maori Party and United Future.

#### ACT New Zealand



Leader: Hon Rodney Hide  
Deputy Leader: Hon Heather Roy

ACT is a classically liberal party, whose core platform focuses on the promotion of free market economics, low taxation, reduced government expenditure, and increased punishments for crime. It sees itself as promoting accountability and transparency in



government. ACT has a formal confidence and supply agreement with the present National-led Government with two Ministers outside Cabinet.

### **Maori Party**



Co-Leaders: Hon Tariana Turia and Hon Pita Sharples

The Māori party promotes what it sees as the rights and interests of Māori. The party sees their role centering on the development of relationship between Māori and the Crown. The Maori Party has a formal confidence and supply agreement with the present National-led Government with two Ministers outside Cabinet.

### **United Future**



Leader: Hon Peter Dunne

United Future is a moderately centre-right party formerly with a strong Christian background: it describes itself as being based around “common sense”. It has a particular focus on policies concerning the family and social issues. United Future has a confidence and supply agreement with the current National-led Government, with the Party Leader serving as a Minister outside Cabinet.

### **New Zealand Labour Party**



Leader: Hon Phil Goff

Deputy Leader: Hon Annette King

The Labour Party is a centre-left, socially progressive party. The leader serves as the current Leader of the Opposition. The Labour Party has been in Government on five separate occasions for varying lengths of time.

### **Green Party**



Co- Leaders: Metiria Turei and Russel Norman

The Green Party is a left-wing environmentalist party. The Green Party had a co-operation agreement with the previous Labour-led Government, but has not formally been in government.

### **Progressive Party**



Leader: Hon Jim Anderton

The Progressive Party is a left-wing party. The party’s recent focus has been on job creation and regional development.